

Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping



Menu for a Hummingbird Garden

Few sights outdoors are more delightful than the charmed beauty of hummingbirds. They seem to appear as if by magic, hovering with nearly invisible wings, silently darting from flower to flower. Adorned in iridescent green and scarlet, these visitors can be coaxed into almost any garden with just a handful of the appropriate nectar-rich flowers.

To attract the Ruby-throated Hummingbird, the only species found in our region, you need only remember that hummingbirds, or "hummers," have an insatiable sweet tooth. Any bird passing through the area will sample a flower with an abundance of nectar.

However, these winged gourmets prefer showy trumpet-shaped flowers. You will understand why as you watch the hummer dip its narrow bill deep into the tubular recesses of the flower, its long tongue busily lapping up nectar, while the top of its head helps collect and distribute pollen from one flower to another. Another significant feature of these so-called hummingbird plants is flower positioning, where sufficient space is provided between each flower on a vine or stalk to accommodate the bird's whirring wings.

Interestingly, ornithologists believe approximately 150 plants native to North America have co-evolved with hummingbirds to create this perfect marriage of bird shape and flower structure.

In addition to flower shape, hummingbirds display a strong preference for the color red. Unlike insects, which often rely on scent to attract them, birds depend more on vision and prominent visual clues. For hummers, the most delectable plants are usually bright red,

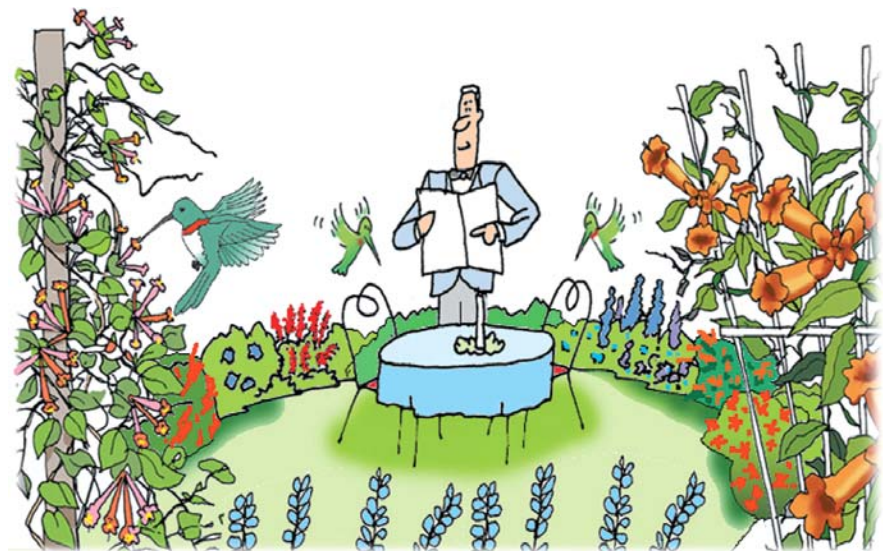
although more and more ardent hummingbird watchers are noting that blue and purple flowers are also quite popular.

When planning a hummingbird garden, note that our ruby-throated guests are migratory, spending winter months in Central America, Mexico, and the Gulf states; they typically arrive in mid-April and depart by mid-to late-September or early October, depending on nighttime temperatures. Consequently, you will want to select plants with overlapping bloom periods, and not simply provide a quick display of color in June.

Also, while you can scatter the appropriate plants here and there across your existing landscape, you might get better results by combining a number of hummingbird plants in one area, preferably in an open location. Naturally, your garden must be maintained without pesticides, to protect the hummers as well as the rest of your local ecosystem.

Preparing your menu of plants is easy. Up and down the East Coast, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are known for their partiality to bee balm, cardinal flower and two easily-grown native vines: trumpet creeper and coral honeysuckle, both of which will need a trellis or fence for support.

Also, no genus of plants has a closer relationship with hummingbirds than the *salvias*, most of which are native to Central America. The common red *salvia* is the annual plant overused in many public landscapes, although it is a good source of nectar and is easily started indoors from seed. However, there are a number of other species of interest, commonly referred to as sages, which combine ornamental and culinary attributes. Among the most recommended red specimens are Texas sage (*Salvia coccinea*) and the edible lipstick-red flowers and fruit-scented leaves of pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*).



For a cooler look, consider anise sage, one of the best hummingbird magnets. It is also called giant blue or Costa Rican sage (*Salvia guaranitica*) and features dazzling, cobalt blue tubular flowers delicately jutting out from a 10- to 12-inch spike from early summer through late autumn. Unfortunately, while botanically a perennial, anise sage cannot tolerate our winter conditions, which is true of many of the other sages ideal for hummingbirds, including the blue and purple flowered Mexican bush sage.

In some cases, dedicated gardeners might want to take some of these semi-tropical species indoors to overwinter, bringing them outdoors again in mid-spring as the hummers return. Other outstanding hummingbird plants in need of overwintering are lantana and scarlet bouvardia (*Bouvardia ternifolia*).

Butterflybush, in all its dark purple and pink forms, also attracts hummingbirds as readily as butterflies, although Buddleia species are becoming somewhat invasive when planted in and around natural areas. In fact, as hummingbirds and butterflies employ similar feeding habits, your hummingbird garden will handily double as a butterfly garden, thereby providing even more delightful color throughout the warmer months.

Rounding out the list of the most popular plants are small trees like scarlet buckeye, and shrubs like native rhododendron and the common rose of sharon, with blossoms available in pink, red and purple. Other selections include red columbine, common milkweed, foxglove, false indigo, Mexican cigar plant, and shrimp plant.

Like any landscape plan undertaken to attract and nurture wildlife, a hummingbird garden repays the gardener with beautiful flashes of winged color, amusing antics and the peace that comes from nourishing and appreciating the natural world.

A note about hummingbird feeders

Relying on plastic feeders to attract hummingbirds has some distinct disadvantages. Feeders are much more likely to attract ants and yellow jackets, among other pests. Also, to protect the health of the birds, you must change the sugar solution every several days, carefully mixing or preparing the mix at the full recommended strength. Cutting corners and cheating the birds is detrimental to their well-being.

Feeders should be emptied and thoroughly cleaned periodically. Never place a feeder near a window. Your view might be better, but the birds can injure themselves against the glass. One recommendation is using a feeder only as a supplement in late summer, if some of your hummingbird plants are no longer in bloom, although it is always best to select a variety of suitable plants to feed and attract hummers year-round.

Planting Menu

Common Name	Botanical Name	A/P	Bloom Period	S/sh	Color
Annuals and Perennials					
Bee Balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	P	Summer	S/sh	purple, red, white
Wild Bergamot	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	P	Summer	S/sh	pale pink
Scarlet Bouvardia	<i>Bouvardia ternifolia</i>	T	Summer	sh	pale pink, red
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	P	Summer-Fall	S/sh	red
Columbine, Wild	<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	P	Spring-Summer	S/sh	red with yellow
Coral-bells	<i>Heuchera sanguinea</i>	P	Spring-Summer	S/sh	pink, coral
Foxglove, Common	<i>Digitalis Spp.</i>	P/*	Summer-Fall	S/sh	numerous
Fuchsia	<i>Fuchsia Spp.</i>	T	Spring-Fall	S/sh	numerous
Jewelweed	<i>Impatiens capensis</i>	A/*	Summer-Fall	sh	orange, yellow
Mexican Sunflower	<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>	A/*	Summer>Frost	S	orange, yellow
Common Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	P	Summer-Fall	S	pink
Pentas	<i>Pentas lanceolata</i>	T	Spring>Frost	S/sh	numerous
Sage, Anise	<i>Salvia guaranitica</i>	P	Summer-Fall	S	blue
Sage, Pineapple	<i>Salvia elegans</i>	T	Fall>Frost	S	red
Sage, Scarlet	<i>Salvia splendens</i>	A	Summer>Frost	S	red, purple, white
Shrub Verbena	<i>Lantana camara</i>	T	Spring>Frost	S	red, orange, yellow
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia elegans</i>	A	Summer>Frost	S	numerous
Trees and Shrubs					
Butterfly Bush	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>		Summer>Frost	S	numerous
Butterfly Bush	<i>Buddleia alternifolia</i>		Spring	S	lavender
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i>		Spring	S/sh	purple, pink
Rose of Sharon	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>		Summer-Fall	S/sh	white, pink, purple
Scarlet Buckeye	<i>Aesculus pavia</i>		Spring	sh	red
Vines					
Trumpet Creeper	<i>Campsis radicans</i>	P	Summer-Fall	S	red/orange
Coral Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>	P	Spring>Frost	S	red/pink/orange

A=Annual P=Perennial T=Tender *=may reseed S= prefers sun sh=prefers shade S/sh=tolerant of both



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